

**Public Input and Program Development for The Commons Playground  
Summary of RFQ Orientation Meeting  
August 12, 2003**

Mike Keogh welcomed attendees and introduced members of the Commons Playground Renovation Committee. The committee consists of representatives of the Columbus Parks and Recreation Department staff, the Columbus Area Arts Council staff, kidscommons (local children's museum currently located in the facility) staff and board, and Commons Centre (privately owned retail/commercial portion of the facility) ownership. All these organizations have a strong interest in the future of the playground.

Louis Joyner, committee member, gave a brief overview of the history of architectural design excellence in the City of Columbus. He emphasized the significance of The Commons playground in the overall design and function of The Commons, and the importance of excellence in the entire process that will lead to a renovated play space for the community within The Commons.

Ed Curtin, committee member, went over the RFQ document, noting the scope of services required, the selection criteria, and the timetable. All information necessary to submit an acceptable qualifications packet can be found in the RFQ.

The committee responded to questions raised by attendees and then led attendees on a quick walkthrough of The Commons and the playground.

Information based on questions raised during the orientation is given below.

Timeline

The deadline for submission of qualifications is September 8, 2003 at 5:00 P.M. E.S.T. The qualifications package is to be mailed/delivered to Columbus Parks and Recreation Department, P.O. Box 858, 22<sup>nd</sup> and Sycamore Streets, Columbus, Indiana 47201.

It is expected that the first cut among those submitting qualifications will be made by mid October, and interviews with finalists will take place on or around November 18, 2003.

A contract will be entered with the winning firm by mid December.

Public input and program development will be completed within the first six months of 2004.

Public Input Process

The public input process should include a wide cross section of the community. While there may be several distinct individuals or groups that should be surveyed, we primarily want to know the thoughts and ideas of children and adults in general.

The input may be obtained in a number of different settings and through various means. There should be one or more public meetings open to the general public. There are opportunities for involving child participants of kidscommons children museum programs. Elementary school children in year-round curricula could be involved in brainstorming during an intersession.

There is tremendous community interest in The Commons playground. It is the most heavily used playground within the City's park system. We expect that the input process will receive a large amount of media coverage, which should result in an ability to obtain a large volume of comment from people of all ages.

The plan for obtaining input, including the information to be obtained and the means by which the information is obtained, will be developed by the winning firm, following discussion and agreement with playground committee representatives designated by the owners.

Among information to be obtained is evidence of how much support there is for continuing to have a public playground inside The Commons and how open individuals are to contributing to a community fund raising effort. (We expect the construction to be funded in approximately equal parts by City tax funds and by foundation grants and contributions from businesses, organizations, and individuals.)

We want to know what people like about the current playground and what they dislike. What would they want the space to be like if renovated?

Much of the actual collection of input may be accomplished by people (volunteers, contracted labor) other than members of the winning firm, depending upon the agreement made between the owner and winning firm. This would be done to facilitate the gathering of information in a cost effective manner. The winning firm will prepare the plan, perform some collection, compile and evaluate the data, prepare documentation of the data and conclusions, and develop the program for the playground based on the data gathered. Actual design development is not a part of this contract.

#### Other topics related to the playground

The playground committee has no preconceived notions about what a renovated play space should be. The physical space could extend beyond the current area. It could possibly go to the east, into the area outside the window that now forms the eastern boundary of the playground. It could extend to the north, as well. It could also make use of the second level space above the current play area.

There are constraints, however, in that the food businesses are likely to stay where they currently are. Also, tables, chairs, and professional grade audiovisual equipment are stored in an area beyond the restrooms. A walkway between the food vendors and the play area must be maintained for movement of this equipment to and from the performance area in The Commons.

Currently there are very few organized activities in the playground. That is not to say that we couldn't have more of these. Typically, however, playgrounds are left to casual use by children and their parents. Also, currently there is no supervision of the play area by staff or volunteers. Parents are expected to supervise their own children, but this hasn't been especially effective. Supervision is an issue that may be raised as input is gathered.

The current thought, as expressed in the Consumer Product Safety Commission guidelines on playgrounds is that play experiences for preschoolers should be separated from those of older children. We are open to creative ways to deal with the protection of younger children without having to have physically separate areas for younger and older

children. We also expect that the renovation design will permit children with developmental and physical challenges to participate in play in meaningful ways, in accordance with ADA requirements and in the spirit of joyful play.

Whatever changes are made to the playground should be in keeping with the vision of Mr. Cesar Pelli, architect of The Commons and The Commons playground. In his words in a recent letter, the playground "was useable, interesting and appealing to young children. It was also ...an architectural composition, complementing and enhancing the character of the rest of The Commons. ...It would be very critical that the qualities I described be maintained. The new playground can be as up-to-date as our design was in the 1970s and also be attractive, enjoyable, elegant and architectural."

There is no consolidated history of the playground. Injury information is recorded when reported. We may average a dozen reports a year. These typically are for bumps, bruises, small cuts or scrapes from falls, collisions with other children. Emergency calls for emergency medical assistance are extremely infrequent. Normally an ice pack or bandage is all that is needed. There only have been a couple of legal claims filed over the years, the last being in the mid 1990s.

The playground has remained mostly as it was created. Firepoles from Level 2 were removed in 1992 and a circular climber on top of the mound was removed in 2002, both for safety reasons.

The metal components of the playground have remained in excellent condition. Steel rails and bars were repainted several years ago. The life of the carpet surfacing has been approximately seven years. The entire carpet and padding system was last replaced in 1996. The mound area was repaired with new carpeting and padding in the spring of 2002. The cost for the overall carpet replacement in 1996 was approximately \$31,000. The 2002 mound repair was approximately \$5,500. (Note that incorrect information was given at the orientation on dates and costs related to carpet replacement.)

The playground has neither drains nor drainage system. The floor and mound is concrete. The playground carpet is vacuumed daily and cleaned twice a month with extraction methods.

Any questions concerning this project should be addressed to either Ed Curtin, [ecurtin@columbus.in.gov](mailto:ecurtin@columbus.in.gov) or Mike Keogh, [mkeogh@columbus.in.gov](mailto:mkeogh@columbus.in.gov). The telephone number for both is 812 376-2680.

This information will be e-mailed to attendees and will also be placed on the parks and recreation website, [www.columbusparksandrec.com](http://www.columbusparksandrec.com).

A list of attendees will be distributed to attendees and to persons requesting the list. It will not be placed on the website.

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